

## **Memorandum**

**To: Harpswell Selectmen**

**From: David Chipman, Chair, Governance Committee**

**Date: 11/20/2008**

**Subject: Selecting a Treasurer**

Over several meetings, the Governance Committee has had extensive discussion and debate on the question of whether the Harpswell Treasurer should be elected by the voters or appointed by the Board of Selectmen. Following the committee's recommendation to the Board of Selectmen that the treasurer continue as an elected official, the selectmen asked the committee to reconsider the matter.

It is clear there is divided opinion among committee members. The committee has been polled twice with differing results. The first time, the majority favored continuing to elect the treasurer. During the second polling, the committee voted to recommend appointment of the treasurer. (Note that a quorum was present in each instance.)

It also seems clear that in any future polling of the committee on this topic, the result will depend upon who is in attendance on that day. Given this background, and after considerable further consideration, the committee has opted to submit to the Board of Selectmen the rationales offered by those on each side of the question as an aid to the selectmen in making their decision.

*Those who favor continuing to elect the Harpswell treasurer offer the following:*

- The election of some officials, including the treasurer, provides checks and balances in local government in that it maintains a limit on the power of the selectmen.
- The Town has a long tradition of electing the treasurer.
- An elected official can be removed from office by the electorate through the power of a recall ordinance, whereas, there is no comparable way in which the citizenry can remove an appointed official from office.
- The system of electing the treasurer has resulted in excellent treasurers over the years and there is no reason to believe that it will not continue to do so.
- Elected treasurers have been residents of the town and thus familiar with both the traditions and practices of Harpswell government.
- It is highly likely that appointing a treasurer would require a significantly larger salary than is now the case.

*Committee members who favor appointment of a treasurer cite the following reasons:*

- Under Maine law, Harpswell may not establish qualifications for an elected treasurer (or any elected position) beyond a few very basic items such as being a U. S. citizen. This is an increasing problem at a time when the work required of the treasurer becomes increasingly complex, calling for a stronger background in financial matters and specifically, municipal finance.
- As a practical matter, the search for a treasurer would be advertised and could be expected to draw applicants from a larger pool of candidates.

- With no meaningful qualification requirements for the post, there is a distinct possibility that a totally unqualified individual could be elected as treasurer. The position has not been drawing multiple candidates. There is no reason to believe that Harpswell's good luck of the past will continue.
- Among towns in a size range comparable to Harpswell (4,000 to 6,000) Harpswell is the only town that elects its treasurer.